

h. Consider appropriately naming the retained and repurposed span to reflect leadership of this effort.



Public safety:

We note that MdTA has said they have already started removing safety features from the existing span, even while cars and trucks continue to use the bridge. This strikes us as concerning and seems to be an effort to make it appear demolition is irreversible.

Accommodation for cyclists on the new span consists of a push button to activate overhead flashing lights and some signage to advise cars and 20-ton trucks that a person on a bicycle may be ahead – somewhere in the right lane of a 1.6-mile bridge posted at 50 miles per hour with no bailout space.

It is our position both bicyclists and pedestrians can easily and safely be accommodated by keeping the existing span, if evaluated to be viable. Funding continues to be available for bridge projects like this in Maryland as the state will receive more than \$400 million for bridge repair through RAISE grants and other federal infrastructure grants. These potential funds cannot be used if MdTA continues to destroy the existing span as fast as possible.

MdTA has also stated there are no nearby trail or on-road bike or ped facilities. In this they are currently correct, because no one has built a path or on-road connection to an existing bridge that does not currently permit bikes or pedestrians. However, the Potomac Heritage/Dahlgren Trail is less than two miles from the bridge on the Virginia side of the Potomac River. and could easily connect to the existing span, when pedestrian and bicycle use is allowed, as was considered in the Environmental Assessment. Further, the existing railroad line to the Morgantown coal fired power plant is an opportunity to create a rail/trail conversion. With the power plant closing this year, the decreased rail traffic on this line may be cause of abandonment and repurposing. This railroad line will connect all the way from Bowie to the existing Nice/Middleton bridge.

We point to the B&A Trail in Anne Arundel, the Capital Crescent Trail in Montgomery, the Western Maryland Rail Trail in Washington and Allegany and the Torrey C. Brown Trail in Baltimore as successful rail-to-trail conversion projects within the state which are now major attractions. The separated bicycle and pedestrian trail on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge attracts 275,000 users per year, the majority are walkers, who arrive by car just to walk the bridge.

The Department of Commerce Office of Tourism has determined that bicyclists and pedestrians who travel to use the C&O Canal National Historic Park and the Great Allegheny Passage generate more than \$100/day each in direct local economic spending. “Spending by visitors to the C&O Canal NHP surpassed \$309 million in 2019 resulting in more than \$253.5 million in total economic impact (value added) for the local area.” A fraction of that economic impact would justify retaining the existing span. We believe the benefit of retaining the existing span and the potential trail connections should be fairly and independently evaluated. This is not an area MdTA has experience or expertise in and is now avoiding inclusion of those who do.

Bridge conversions for bike/ped use can be done and have become major attractions. The Walkway over the Hudson at Poughkeepsie is a massive tourism attraction. The Tappan Zee bridge replacement, a 3.6-mile span over the Hudson, 20 miles north of New York City, includes bike/ped accommodations. Here in Maryland, both the Woodrow Wilson and the planned American Legion Bridge accommodate both pedestrians and bicyclists. We have an existing

span crossing the Potomac River in Charles County, we need to give every due consideration before removing it.

Transfer of ownership

MdTA indicated they were willing to transfer ownership to others but not keep it themselves. In no case have they indicated \$15-23 million in funds saved by not demolishing the existing span could be provided to the recipient to alleviate any remediation and upkeep. MdTA's estimate for future maintenance estimate appears substantially higher than the ongoing maintenance for a bridge currently carrying vehicular traffic. An independent evaluation as to the future upkeep for exclusive use by bikes and peds along with potential revenue increases due to cyclotourism and other utilization does not appear to have been balanced against the cost of the upkeep.

Scour concerns

MdTA states the existing piers must be removed to prevent bridge scour to the new piers. Yet MdTA also says they are and were willing to give the existing span to others thus the existing piers should remain. We recommend the stated scour concern be independently evaluated.

Environmental impacts and lack of evaluation

MdTA states the debris from the destroyed existing span will be used to create a fish reef. Per MdTA, the removal of the span also counts toward decreased impervious surface. However, the Sierra Club supports keeping the existing span, so the environmental benefits of destroying the span seem to be in doubt. These environmental impact claims should be re-evaluated in the independent study.

Other MdTA concern

MdTA expressed concern that people would not use the old bridge because of the slope while at the same time saying that bikers would happily ride on the new bridge, in traffic, with a similar slope. The slope is not dissimilar to the slopes of other successful trails in use all over the state,

Due consideration

Since the new span will safely carry vehicular traffic before the old span can be removed, there is no need for undue haste to destroy the existing span. An existing crossing of a major river should not be summarily discarded without appropriate and thorough consideration.

Sincerely,

For BM

The Maryland Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
Jonathan B. Morrison, Chair

